

First-Time Voters' Tracking Study: Because Once Is Never Enough

A Pace University Pace Poll/Rock the Vote Survey Research Study

October 27, 2004

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“You know what they call a candidate who’s counting on a lot of new voters? A loser.”

- James Carville

“It turns out that well over half of new voters registered in Ohio...hail from just eight urban counties.... They make up nearly 6 percent of the entire...statewide electorate, at a time when the latest polls show President Bush and Democrat John Kerry running neck-and-neck.”

- Julie Carr Smyth and Diane Solov, Plain Dealer Reporters (October 08, 2004)

I. INTRODUCTION

In American politics, new voters are the electoral equivalent of Samuel Beckett’s Godot – a mysterious and potentially all-powerful force that may or may not reward our expectant waiting. As part of their ongoing commitment to enhancing the public debate, increasing civic participation, and expanding the community of fully-engaged citizens, Pace University’s Pace Poll and Rock the Vote initiated a three-part study of new voters, which we define as voters who registered *after* the 2000 Presidential election.¹

This report analyzes the second of these three surveys, and at this point in the campaign new voters have witnessed the party conventions, the presidential debates, and a great deal of political advertising. This study attempts to assess the impact of these events on new voters’ perceptions of the candidates, the campaigns, and the political process itself.

Our final poll in this study will survey new voters in the immediate aftermath of the election, when we will assess their initial response to their first complete presidential election. That last poll should finish in early November (the Supreme Court willing).

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

¹ See methodology.

First-time voters are motivated to vote; 83% report that they are certain to turn out on Election Day. Their enthusiasm does not spring from their optimism regarding the country's current direction, however. Only two in five new voters (40%) believe America is headed in the right direction while 49% think it is off on the wrong track. Despite their pessimism, new voters trust the electoral process; 79% are either "very" or at least "somewhat" confident that their votes will be counted fairly and accurately.

Among new voters, there is considerable evidence that Red and Blue America have very little in common with each other. Supporters of President George W. Bush think he is leading the country in the right direction (74% right direction, 13% wrong track), winning the War in Iraq (90% approve of his handling of Iraq, 7% disapprove), and steering the economy towards prosperity (87% approve of his handling of the economy, 8% disapprove). In contrast, supporters of Senator John Kerry think the President is leading the country in the wrong direction (8% right direction, 88% wrong track), losing the War in Iraq (7% approve, 92% disapprove), and steering the economy towards ruin (7% approve, 89% disapprove of his handling of the economy).

New voters, however, are connected by their knowledge of the candidates' positions on domestic issues. For example, over three-quarters (77%) of them know that Bush is pro-life, and 65% know Kerry is pro-choice. Likewise, 51% know that Bush favors some privatization of Social Security, and 69% know Kerry has promised to withdraw all U.S. forces from Iraq in the next four years. Despite that foundation of campaign literacy, there appears to be an unbreakable core of campaign illiteracy among approximately 12% of new voters who know virtually nothing about the candidates' domestic policy positions.

Senator Kerry's unfavorability rating has risen 10 points since July to 46%. During the same time period, the President gained 8 points on Senator Kerry in the head-to-head ballot question, moving from 40% in July to 48% today. Although the chronological overlap between Kerry's decline in *personal* favorability and Bush's rise in the head-to-head ballot may be nothing more than a coincidence, it seems logical to infer that President Bush's success with new voters stems from his ability to raise doubts about Senator Kerry. If so, the President's success is particularly striking because new voters generally believe Senator Kerry won the debates; twice as many new voters (44%) think Kerry won the debates as think Bush won (22%). And most new voters saw the debates; 84% saw or heard at least one debate, and 40% saw or heard all three. In short, our finding that the debates did not move new voters towards the perceived winner provides some evidence for the proposition that new voters are susceptible to other forms of political persuasion, including campaign advertising. [See Jonathan Trichter & Christopher Paige, *FIRST-TIME VOTERS: YOU NEVER FORGET YOUR FIRST PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION*, The Pace Poll/Rock the Vote, p. 14, July 26, 2004.]

Thus, the President leads Kerry among new voters 48% to 44%. But first-time voters who remain undecided may wind up supporting the challenger. For on the whole, undecided voters do not approve of the President personally; only 22% have a favorable opinion of him while 54% have an unfavorable opinion of him. In addition, they do not

approve of his job performance; 36% approve of the job he is doing as president while 45% disapprove.

Moreover, Kerry seems to be benefiting from the issues landscape. When new voters are asked to name the issue that is most important to winning their vote, Iraq (18%) and jobs or the economy (15%) predominate. And while one might suspect that Iraq is a pro-Bush issue, this does not appear to be the case among new voters. To wit, 28% of strong Kerry supporters compared to just 9% of strong Bush supporters cite Iraq as their chief reason for voting the way they are.

On the other hand, Bush does well on the terrorism issue; 20% of his supporters say it is the top issue affecting their vote. For new voters overall, 15% say terrorism is driving their vote. Among new voters, however, the sleeper issue may be the draft: a majority (56%) is “very” or “somewhat” concerned that the Federal government will reinstitute the draft.

New voters are tuned into this campaign. A majority (52%) saw or heard the Democratic National Convention, and 50% saw the Republican National Convention. Most importantly, more than a quarter (27%) of new voters says the conventions made them more interested in the campaign. The Presidential debates drew in an even larger percentage of new voters; 77% followed the debates at least “somewhat closely.” And among all new voters, Kerry was the clear winner by two to one (44% to 22%).

Today, more new voters have talked to another person about a candidate (49% today, 36% in July) or displayed campaign paraphernalia (22% today, 12% in July). But they have not become more likely to attend political meetings (11% to 11%), more likely to donate money (12% to 11%) to a campaign, or more likely to predict that they will be more politically active in the future (35% to 34%).

In our next survey, we will see if these opinions change as new voters look back on their first Presidential election. We also will determine whether Kerry or Bush benefited from the influx of new voters, and whether new voters determined the electoral outcome.

III. WHO ARE THESE FIRST-TIME VOTERS?

For the purposes of this study, “first-time voters” (a.k.a. “new voters”) are defined as those who registered *after* the presidential election of 2000. Some of our “new” voters may have voted in recent non-federal and/or mid-term elections. For convenience, though, we refer to recently registered voters with and without non-presidential voting experiences as “first-time” or “new” voters, and this study examines voters’ reactions to their first *presidential* election without regard to their previous participation in non-presidential elections.

We believe our decision to treat all first-time presidential voters alike is justified given the unique nature of presidential campaigns, which generate far more media coverage and

public interest for far longer periods of time than other political races. In addition, presidential elections are this country's best approximation of a national election and therefore lend themselves better to a national study. In contrast, local variables play too large a part in first-time voters' experiences in non-presidential elections to permit a meaningful national study.

To further assist the analysis, we divided new voters into several psychographic groups.

- “*Knowledgeable voters*” know that President Bush favors some privatization of Social Security and that Senator Kerry promised to withdraw all U.S. troops from Iraq during the next four years.
- “*Uninformed voters*” know neither candidate's position on Social Security and withdrawing troops from Iraq.
- “*Convention watchers*” saw on TV or heard on radio both national conventions, and they followed both conventions at least somewhat closely.
- “*Debate watchers*” saw or heard all three presidential debates, and they followed the debates at least somewhat closely.
- “*Politically-active*” new voters have attempted to persuade at least one person to vote for their candidate, and they have displayed campaign paraphernalia, attended a political meeting, or contributed money to a campaign.

Who are this election's first-time voters? The analysis of our benchmark study addresses more completely new voters' demographic details. [*Please see* Jonathan Trichter & Christopher Paige, *FIRST-TIME VOTERS: YOU NEVER FORGET YOUR FIRST PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION*, The Pace Poll/Rock the Vote, July 26, 2004]. Nevertheless, a quick reminder of this key voting bloc's demographic highlights is in order.

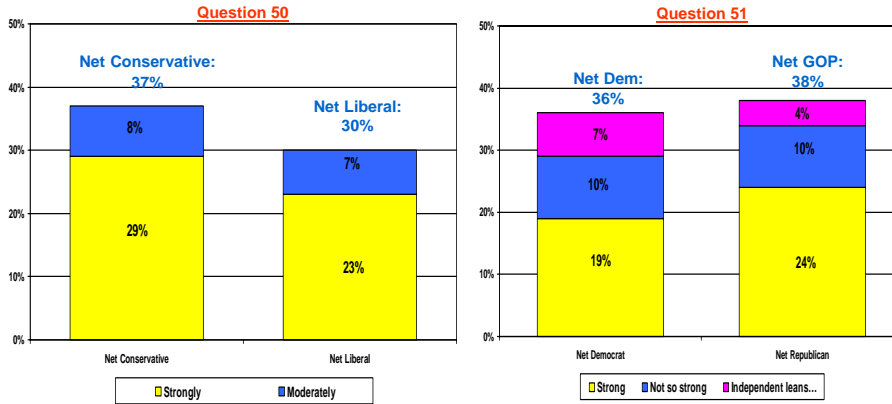
New voters are religious. More than 4 in 10 (41%) attend religious services at least once a week, and an additional 15% attend church once or twice a month. Thirty-eight percent consider themselves “born-again” or “evangelicals” (compared to 23% nationwide, according to Gallup).

New voters are slightly more conservative than liberal. Twenty-three percent consider themselves “liberals” while an additional 7% describe themselves as “moderate liberals.” On net, therefore, 30% of new voters say they are political liberals. In contrast, 29% of first-timers consider themselves to be “conservative,” and an additional 8% say they are “moderate conservatives.” On net, therefore, 37% are political conservatives. Statistically speaking, however, neither party has an advantage: 38% consider themselves Republicans, and 36% say they are Democrats.

First-time Voters Lean Conservative

Questions 50: When it comes to political issues, do you think of yourself as a liberal, a conservative, or a moderate [If moderate, ask: "Do you lean liberal or conservative"]?

Questions 51: Do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an independent, or something else [If GOP or DEM, ask: "Do you consider yourself a strong Republican/Democrat or a not so strong Republican/Democrat?"] [If independent, ask: "Do you lean more toward the Republicans or more towards the Democrats"]?



The First-time Voters Tracker Survey by Pace University & Rock the Vote

Chart 1

Why hasn't conservatives' ideological advantage translated into a partisan advantage for the GOP? There are many plausible theses for this apparent ideological/partisan gap, but two immediately spring to mind. First, the word "liberal" may be a pejorative for many Americans, and some new voters may be reluctant to describe themselves as such, even if their political beliefs truly are progressive. Unfortunately, the word "liberal" is the most generally recognized term for adherents of progressive ideologies; consequently, pollsters must continue to use the word, which means that polling may not be able to measure the percentage of "liberals" in America as precisely as they can conservatives.

Second, it's not clear that the word "conservative" retains an agreed upon definition that renders it a synonym for "Republican." In the very recent past, a "conservative" favored small government, balanced budgets, and a cautious foreign policy. Arguably, George W. Bush has reinvented conservatism to favor larger government in specific policy arenas, budget deficits, and an aggressive foreign policy. Let us be clear: here we are not questioning the merits of George W. Bush's policy agendas. Rather, we are pointing out that today's "conservatives" may not be a proxy for Republicanism. After all, Democrats used to be America's conservative party, and there's always the possibility that we are witnessing another party realignment, or at least a modest shift. This second thesis is far more controversial than the first, but only time will tell which is more accurate.

New voters in the 2004 Presidential Election are not as young as one might think. Thirty percent are ages 17 to 25; 10% are 26 to 30, and 17% are 31 to 40. Surprisingly, 18% are 41 to 54, 12% are 55 to 64, and 12% are over 65. It is an open question as to why so many new voters appear to register later in life.

New voters are also well educated. Only 5% failed to graduate high school; 27% have a high school diploma and 30% have some college or vocational schooling. More than 1 in 4 (26%) have a college degree, and 11% completed at least some post-graduate work. Twenty-four percent are currently college students. Among college student, 47% are in four-year colleges and 50% are in two-year colleges.

More than 1 in 10 (11%) are Latinos, and most Latinos (56%) are of Mexican origin. But 73% are white, while 9% are Blacks and 3% are Asians.

There is a wide income distribution among first-time voters. Eleven percent earns less than \$20,000 a year; 8% earns between \$20,000 and \$30,000; 18% earns between \$30,000 and \$50,000. (Since America's median income is approximately \$42,000, we infer that about one third of new voters are at or below the median income.) An additional 18% earns between \$50,000 and \$75,000, 9% earns between \$75,000 and \$100,000, and 14% earns at least \$100,000.

IV. ANALYSIS

First-time voters are chomping at the bit.

America's newest voters may be the most enthusiastic. On a scale from 1 to 10 where 1 represents someone who definitely will not vote and 10 represents someone who definitely will vote, 83% of new voters describe themselves as perfect "10s." The youngest new voters are somewhat less likely than new voters in general to be perfect "10s" – 76% of new voters ages 17 to 30 and 74% of new voters ages 17 to 25 say they are certain to vote. Still, those percentages reflect an enthusiasm for voting that should manifest itself at the ballot box on November 2.

New voters are pessimistic.

It might be the case that pessimism regarding the current state of affairs is driving the strong desire to vote; just 40% of new voters believe the country is headed in the right direction, while 49% think it's off on the wrong track. Among people of color, the results are worse. Among Blacks, just 18% think America is headed in the right direction while 76% think the country is off on the wrong track; among Latinos, 31% are optimists while 58% are pessimists. Likewise, new voters between the ages of 26 and 30 are less optimistic (31% right direction) and more pessimistic (60% wrong track) than new voters generally. In contrast, Southern men (57% right direction) and men over 41 (49% right direction) are "glass-half-full" kinds of people while Western men (55% wrong track) and Western women (53% wrong track) are "glass-half-empty" folks.

New voters trust the system.

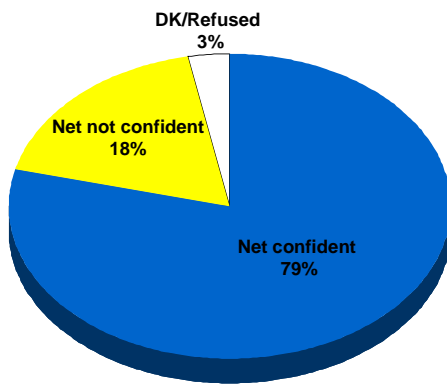
By in large, however, new voters' pessimism doesn't extend to cynicism about the political system itself. In fact, new voters trust America's electoral process. On net, 79% of new voters are at least somewhat confident that their votes will be counted fairly and

accurately (36% are very confident, and 42% are somewhat confident that their votes will be counted fairly and accurately). To be sure, it is possible that those who distrust the vote count would be disinclined to register in the first place in order to participate in what they perceive to be a rigged process. Whatever the case, trust for the system among new registrants is not distributed evenly across their population. Only 70% of Democrats, 64% of African-Americans, and 55% of Black women are, at a minimum, somewhat confident in the integrity of the vote count.

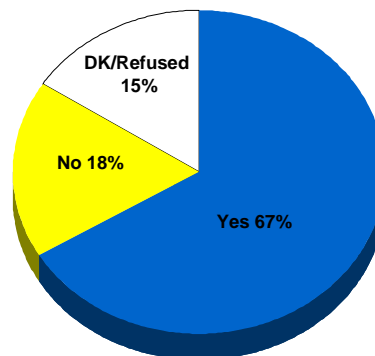
First-time voters are confident that their votes will be counted accurately and that the winner of the 2004 Presidential Election will be the legitimate choice of the majority of Americans.

Question 39: How confident are you that the votes in the 2004 Presidential Election will be counted honestly and accurately?

Question 45: Do you believe the winner of the 2004 Presidential Election will be the legitimate choice of the majority of Americans?



Confident votes will be counted accurately (Question 39)



Winner of election will be legitimate choice of majority (Question 45)

The First-time Voters Tracker Survey by Pace University & Rock the Vote Chart 2

Given their faith in the voting process, it shouldn't be surprising that 67% of new voters believe the winner will be the "legitimate choice" of the majority of the American people; to the contrary, the real surprise is that 12% of new voters trust the count, but don't believe the winner will be "legitimate." Given all the recent attention to the Electoral College and to President Bush's victory despite his defeat in the popular vote, it seems possible that this 12% views "accuracy" and "legitimacy" as two separate issues.

Red & Blue new voters don't have much in common with each other.

A recent University of Maryland study found that President Bush's supporters are unaware of critical issues related to terrorism. (See generally Stephen Kull, THE SEPARATE REALITIES OF BUSH AND KERRY SUPPORTERS, PIPA/Knowledge Networks, October 21, 2004.) Bush supporters, according to this study, believe that both the President and his anti-terrorism policies are popular overseas, that America actually found weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, that America proved an Iraqi link to Al Qaeda, and that the President told Americans that we found Iraq's WMDs as well as an existent link between Iraq and Al Qaeda. None of these are true.

Do these findings suggest that Bush supporters are misinformed? Not necessarily – our study found a majority (55%) of the best-informed new voters on campaign issues favor Bush. The gap between Bush supporters’ understanding of key terrorism issues in the University of Maryland Study and their general political knowledge in our study raises a host of intriguing hypotheses. Is the consensus on truth breaking down? Are we losing the ability to understand basic facts in foreign policy (i.e., that terrorists are likely to attack New York, not Wyoming; that Iraq did not have any weapons of mass destruction, that Iraq did not have any role in 9/11)? Are we losing the ability to agree on a process for determining some facts (i.e., the final report of the President’s own investigation into Iraq’s WMD, the 9/11 Commission, etc.)? [Somewhere, Jacques Derrida must be having a good laugh.] Or are we living in two separate Americas – one Red, one Blue – with distinct and separate sets of “facts” that determine their political beliefs?

Our poll finds considerable evidence for the latter proposition. While 74% of Republicans think the country is headed in the right direction, 82% of Democrats think we’re off on the wrong track. While only 14% of Republicans think we’re moving in the wrong direction, just 11% of Democrats think we’re headed the right way. GOP men (80%) are far more optimistic than GOP women (67%). Not surprisingly, Kerry supporters hate the country’s current course (88% wrong track) while Bush supporters love it (74% right direction). Republicans think the President is doing a good job in Iraq (90% approve; 8% disapprove) while Democrats think he is doing poorly (10% approve; 87% disapprove). Eighty-seven percent of Republicans approve of the President’s handling of the economy; 86% of Democrats disapprove. New voters in the Northeast (43% support; 51% oppose) and West (44% support; 53% oppose) oppose the War in Iraq while Mid-westerners (59% support; 35% oppose) and Southerners (48% support; 39% oppose) support it.

How can one half of the country believe America is doing well, winning the War in Iraq, and making the economy purr while the other half thinks the country is doing terribly, that the War is a disaster, and that the economy is in shambles? Perhaps Americans do not have much in common anymore. The global economy has created new winners and losers, so some Americans have benefited from it and some have not. The terrorist threat is not uniformly distributed across the country, so some Americans have experienced a successful war on terror while others have not. The list could go on, but all of the examples would illustrate the fundamental point that differences of opinion may reflect real differences in experience, rather than differences in thought. The South did not secede from the Union in 1860 because the South had a different concept of the proper form for a national government as much as they seceded because they had a different economic, political, and social system than the North. Although Red and Blue American are unlikely to come to blows, ideological differences do not necessarily arise from ideological causes.

New voters in general are moderately well-informed.

Although 69% of new voters know that John Kerry promised to withdraw all troops from Iraq, 9% incorrectly believe the President made the same pledge. That mistake is

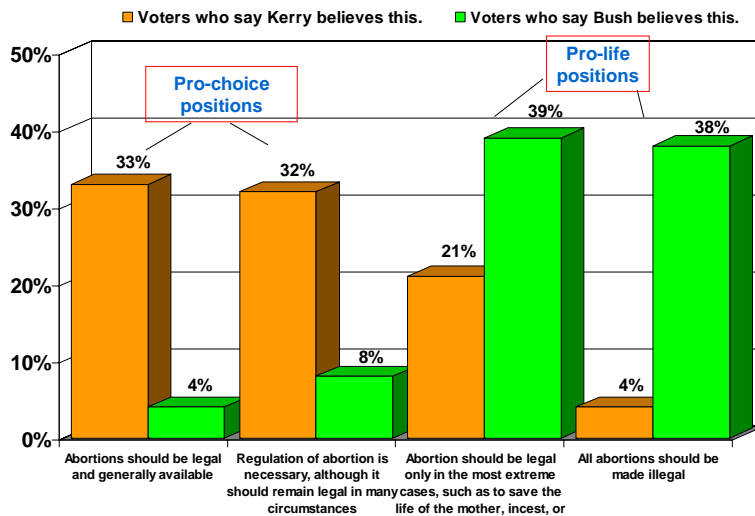
uniformly distributed across all demographic groups, ideologies, and candidate preferences. Meanwhile, a slim majority (51%) knows that President Bush favors some privatization of Social Security, but 12% mistakenly believe this is Kerry's intention. Interestingly, 71% of people over 55 know about the President idea for Social Security; 68% of people with incomes more than \$100,000 a year also know about it.

Sixty-five percent of new voters correctly identify John Kerry as pro-choice on abortion. Yet, 1 in 4 (25%) incorrectly believe he is pro-life. Amazingly, that error rate is consistent in all four regions of the country, which undercuts the proposition that this error may be the result of the campaigns' adapting their appeals to suit regional attitudes. For example, 25% of Southerners misconstrue Kerry's position on abortion – even though one assumes that the Bush campaign would have made more of an effort to paint Kerry as a pro-choice candidate in the more religious South. Likewise, 29% of Northeasterners mistakenly think that Kerry is pro-life – even though one assumes that the Kerry campaign would have made more of an effort to depict their man as pro-choice in the more liberal Northeast. The staggering finding is that 29% of evangelicals – for whom this issue is critical – incorrectly believe that Kerry is pro-life! Women of child-bearing age (17 to 40) are no better informed – 24% think Kerry is pro-life. And people in the lowest income bracket (less than \$20,000 a year) are the most likely (43%) to be wrong about Kerry's position on abortion, while those in the highest (more than \$100,000 a year) are the least likely to be wrong about it (14%). Having watched the conventions and all three debates doesn't seem to have helped people understand Kerry's position on this issue – 22% of both groups are mistaken about Kerry's abortion stance.

New voters are much better informed about President Bush's feeling on abortion; only 12% mistakenly believe he is pro-choice. Here is the real oddity: evangelicals (8%) were only slightly less likely to mis-label the President than non-evangelicals (13%). How could 1 in 12 evangelicals misunderstand the President's position on a core issue of theirs, even as he runs the most expensive and most targeted campaign in history with the express purpose of motivating evangelicals to turn out on Election Day? How could convention watchers and debate watchers miss the President's pro-life language (12% of both groups mis-label the President's position)? Quite simply, there appears to be an irreducible core of ignorance – about one in ten new voters – that does not appreciate the candidates' positions on much of anything, yet they intend to vote anyway.

New voters are aware that Kerry is pro-choice and that Bush is pro-life.

Questions 46 & 47: I'm going to read four statements. When I've finished, please tell me which candidate subscribes to which point of view when it comes to the issue of abortion.



The First-time Voters Tracker Survey by Pace University & Rock the Vote

Chart 3

If rational analysis comprises an examination of relevant facts that lead to a conclusion consistent with those facts, then a considerable number of Americans – at least the 12% who appear ignorant of the President’s chief policy positions – are not rational in their political analysis. Yet, before we pack that 12% off to Bedlam, we should consider the economics associated with acquiring political knowledge. Information is inherently costly to acquire, few Americans find it entertaining, and political information has few – if any – tangible direct benefits for voters. So perhaps the real surprise is that so many first-time voters know as much as they do.

Assessing the candidates

Senator Kerry is narrowly more popular than he is unpopular among new voters (48% of new voters view him favorably compared to 46% who view him unfavorably). He is beloved by Democrats (89% to 7%), Blacks (79% to 13%) and Latinos (62% and 34%), but he is disliked by Republicans (10% to 86%) and in the South (42% to 51%). Ninety-four percent of new voters are familiar enough with John Kerry at this point in the election to offer an opinion of him.

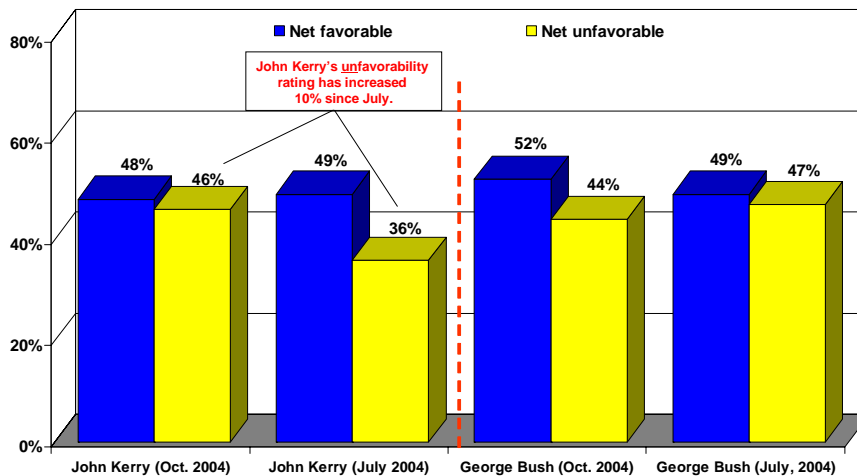
President Bush is slightly more popular than he is unpopular among first-time voters (52% to 44%). Interestingly, there is no gender gap in his personal favorability rating. Among men, he has a 53% favorability rating and a 44% unfavorability rating. Among women, he has a 52% favorability rating and a 44% unfavorability rating. Republicans (93% to 6%) and Southerners (60% to 37%) are big fans of the President. People of color are not. Among Blacks, the President has a 16% favorability rating and a 78% unfavorability rating. Among Latinos, Bush has a 36% favorability rating compared to a

56% unfavorability rating. With independents, Bush scores a 53% favorability rating next to a 38% unfavorability rating – very similar to new voters in general (52% to 44%).

Counterintuitively, Dick Cheney is a mildly popular – 49% have a favorable opinion of the Vice President while 41% hold an unfavorable opinion of him. John Edwards is similarly popular; 46% favorable to 38% unfavorable.

Among new voters, the candidate's favorability ratings have shifted since July.

Questions 4 to 7: Do you have a strongly favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or strongly unfavorable opinion of...?



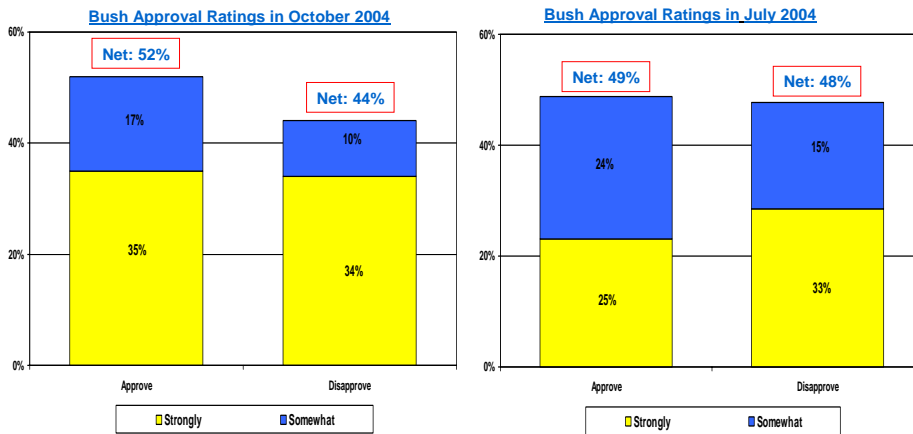
The First-time Voters Tracker Survey by Pace University & Rock the Vote

Chart 4

New voters give the President fairly high job approval numbers – 52% approve of the job Bush is doing as president and 44% disapprove. His performance earns the best reviews in the Midwest (58% to 38%) and South (57% to 38%). But racially, new voters are divided over the President's performance; whites approve of the President's performance in office (60% approve and 36% disapprove) while Blacks do not (13% approve and 81% disapprove).

Presidential Job Approval in October & July 2004

Question 8: Do you approve or disapprove of the job George W. Bush is doing as president [if answer, ask: "Would that be strongly or only somewhat"]?



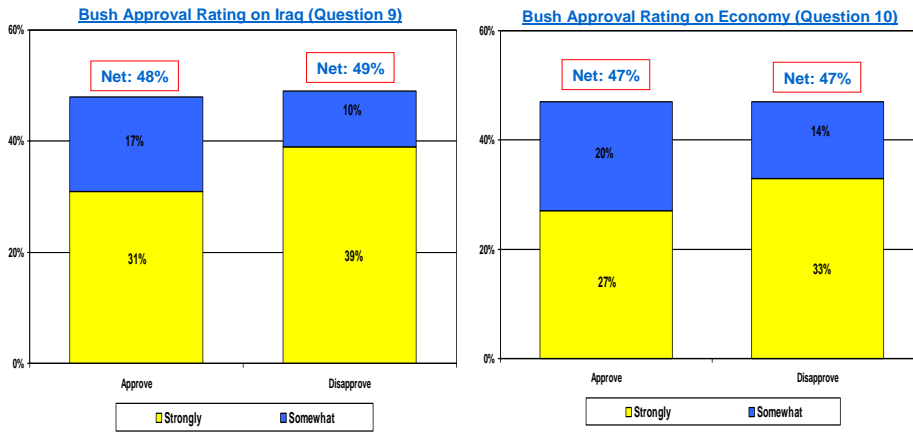
The First-time Voters Tracker Survey by Pace University & Rock the Vote Chart 5

When it comes to the War in Iraq, new voters are divided over the President’s stewardship – 48% approve of the President’s handling of the War in Iraq and 49% disapprove. Interestingly, new voters are divided in their support for the President’s performance in the War along regional lines. Southerners (55% approve and 42% disapprove) and Midwesterners (52% approve and 42% disapprove) generally support the President on this front while Northeasterners (42% approve and 56% disapprove) and Westerners (41% approve and 56% disapprove) do not. Unfortunately, bitter memories of a “white man’s war and a Black man’s fight” could be driving a racial split in opinion over the President’s handling of Iraq, as Blacks (16% approve and 80% disapprove) and Latinos (32% and 68%) vehemently disapprove of the President’s handling of the War.

First-timers also are split on the President’s handling of the economy (47% approve, 47% disapprove).

Bush Job Approval On Iraq & the Economy

Questions 9 & 10: Do you approve or disapprove of the job George W. Bush is doing handling the situation in Iraq/the economy (if answer, ask: "Would that be strongly or only somewhat")?



The First-time Voters Tracker Survey by Pace University & Rock the Vote Chart 6

Ballot Question

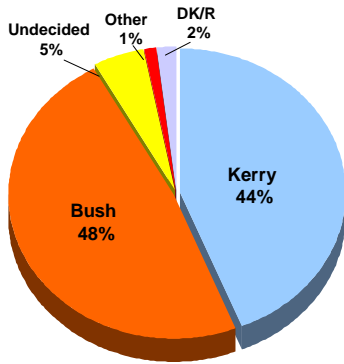
For practical reasons, our sample did not include the final waves of last-minute, new registrants that some states are reporting. Furthermore, our survey cannot predict differential turn-out rates. Consequently, the preferences of the new voters who actually vote on Election Day may differ from those of our sample. We will assess any such sampling-related variances in the final survey after Election Day. Meanwhile, new voters appear to be leaning towards the President (44% for Kerry, 48% for Bush) in their vote choice, although Kerry leads among independents (46% to 39%).

Kerry is performing best among Democrats (85% are voting for Kerry), Blacks (81%) and voters 26 to 30 years old (56%) and worst among Southerners (only 34% are voting for Kerry). In contrast, Bush's best supporters are Republicans (92% are voting for the President), those over age 55 (55%), and Southerners (60%). In a three-way race that includes Ralph Nader, Bush leads Kerry 48% to 42%, with Nader garnering 4%.

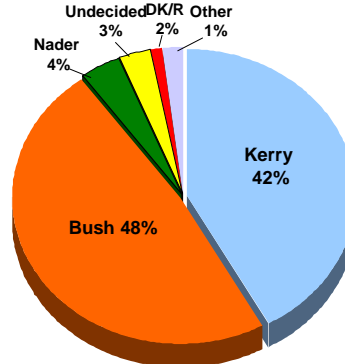
First-time voters prefer Bush by a small margin.

Question 11A: If the election for president were held today and the candidates were [ROTATE] George W. Bush, the Republican, and John Kerry, the Democrat, for whom would you vote?

Question 11B: If the election for president were held today and the candidates were [ROTATE] George W. Bush, the Republican, John Kerry, the Democrat, and Ralph Nader, the independent, for whom would you vote?



Ballot Choice Bush/Kerry (Q11A)
N = 289



Ballot Choice Bush/Kerry/Nader (Q11B)
N = 312

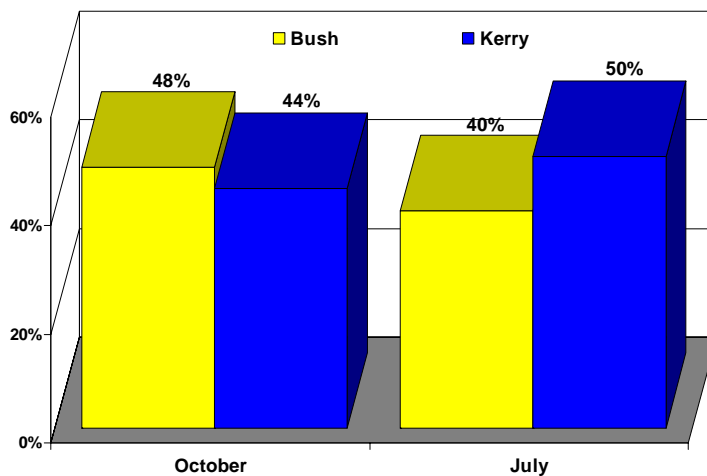
The First-time Voters Tracker Survey by Pace University & Rock the Vote

Chart 7

Bush seems to be gaining ground among new voters as the campaign proceeds. His support has climbed 8 points in a two-candidate race (from 40% in July to 48% now). Meanwhile, Kerry's support has slipped 6 points (from 50% in July to 44% today).

New Voters' candidate preference has shifted since July.

Question 11A: If the election for president were held today and the candidates were [ROTATE] George W. Bush, the Republican, and John Kerry, the Democrat, for whom would you vote?



The First-time Voters Tracker Survey by Pace University & Rock the Vote

Chart 8

Undecided new voters are only undecided about Kerry.

Although conventional wisdom holds that undecided voters weigh issues more carefully than partisan voters, almost a third (31%) of undecided voters skipped the presidential debates. In contrast, just 11% of Bush supporters and 14% of Kerry supporters were similarly uninterested in watching their candidates' face-offs on live television. Indeed, the undecided voters' aversion to the debates is relatively strong; 27% of undecideds saw or heard one debate, 24% saw or heard two, and 18% saw or heard three. In contrast, 18% of Bush and 16% of Kerry supporters saw or heard just one debate; 26% of Bush and 30% of Kerry supporters saw or heard just two debates, and 43% of Bush and 39% of Kerry supporters saw or heard all three. Thus, undecided voters saw and heard less of the candidates during the presidential debates than did partisans, which is to say that some undecided voters are undecided in the same way that a sleeping judge is impartial.

Of course, there is another workable theory about undecided new voters in this election. Specifically, there is a distinct possibility that undecided new voters remain uncommitted out of aversion for the incumbent combined with unwillingness to express their support for the challenger. Evidence for this hypothesis can be found in that undecided voters disproportionately are more likely to be pessimistic about certain things. Almost two thirds (65%) think the country is off on the wrong track, over half (54%) have an unfavorable opinion of the President and give him a negative approval rating on his handling of Iraq (56% disapprove of his handling of Iraq), and the plurality of undecided voters (49%) oppose the War in Iraq. These findings are consistent with the generally accepted "incumbents' rule," which suggests that undecided voters tend to be "undecided" about the challenger, but averse to the incumbent.

The most politically active new voters are anti-Bush.

Likewise, Bush's perceived failings have generated more activism among new voters than his perceived successes. Among politically active new voters, Bush's approval ratings are only 41% compared to a high disapproval rating of 58%. Activist voters also disapprove of the President's handling of the War in Iraq (42% to 57%) and they oppose the War itself (56% oppose the War in Iraq), compared to non-activists who support the War (54% support it).

Issues

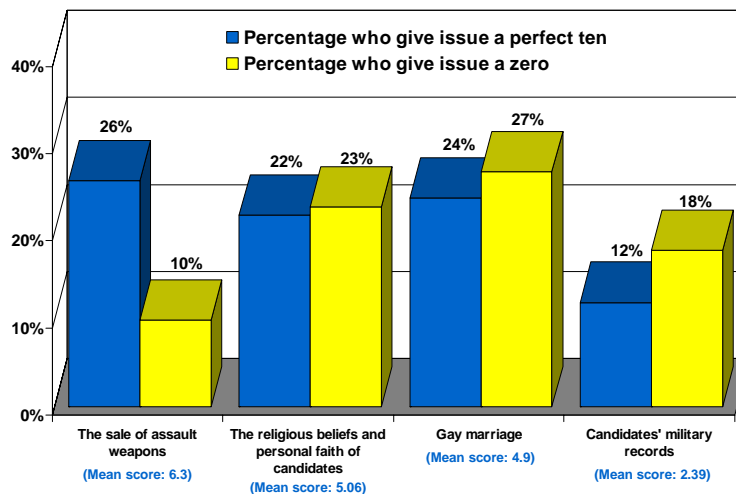
Iraq (18%), terrorism (15%), and jobs or the economy (11%) are the most cited top-of-mind issues driving this election. At first blush, the frequency with which new voters assess Iraq and terrorism seems to favor the incumbent, who has based much of his re-election campaign on his performance in these areas. But Kerry supporters (28%) are far more likely to cite Iraq as the issue driving their vote than Bush supporters (9%).

When asked to assess the importance of four high-profile domestic campaign issues – the sale of assault weapons, gay marriage, the candidates' religious beliefs and personal faiths, and the candidates' military records and service – new voters' reactions come as a

surprise. On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 signifies something voters do not care about at all and 10 signifies something they care about a great deal, more than 1 in 4 (26%) rate the ban on the sale of assault weapons a perfect 10. Likewise, 24% score gay marriage a perfect ten, and 22% say the same about the candidates' religiosity. Just 12% give the candidates' military service a "10." Oddly, women (28%) are more likely to rate the candidates' religion a perfect ten than men (16%). Less oddly, gay marriage is a big issue in the South, where 30% rate it a ten. The ban on assault weapons is a key issue for older Americans (37% of those over 55 score it a ten) and women over 41 (40%).

New Voters' Reactions to High-profile Campaign Issues

Questions 13-16: Now let me read you some issues other people have mentioned as things they care about. I would like you to rate each issue on a scale from 0 to 10, where zero means it is something you do not care about at all and 10 means it is something you care a great deal about.



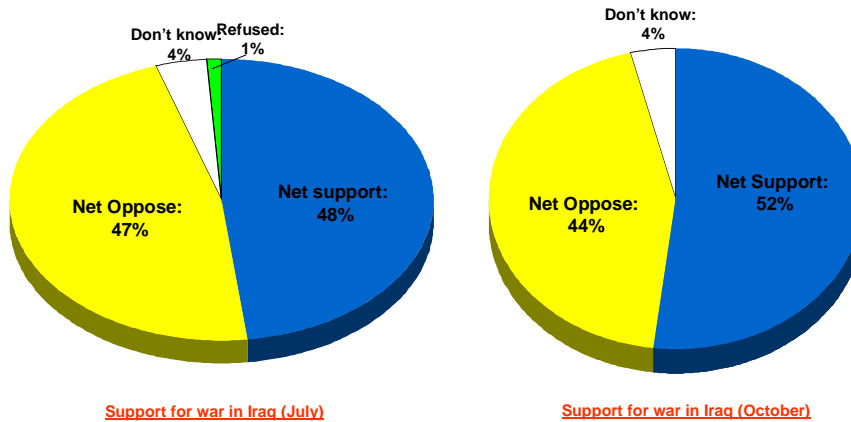
The First-time Voters Tracker Survey by Pace University & Rock the Vote Chart 9

War in Iraq

At present, new voters support the War in Iraq 52% to 44%. Republicans are the most likely to support it (89% to 9%) while Democrats are the most likely to oppose it (15% to 82%). Blacks (21% to 75%) and Latinos (35% to 62%) also oppose it.

First-time voters remain relatively split in their support for the War in Iraq.

Question 17: Do you support or oppose the United States having gone to war with Iraq?



The First-time Voters Tracker Survey by Pace University & Rock the Vote Chart 10

President Bush retains the confidence of new voters on terrorism issues. A clear majority (59%) believes he has done enough to combat terror while just 36% think he has not. Those numbers are statistically unchanged since our benchmark study in July, when they were 58% and 36%, respectively. Apparently, doubts have increased about John Kerry’s ability to prevent terrorism; 44% now think that Kerry would not do enough to protect America from terrorists, which represents an 11% jump since the July Benchmark.

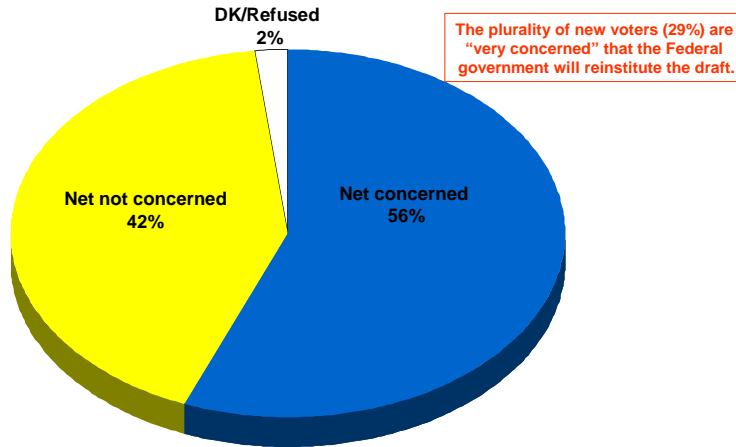
The draft may be a sleeper issue.

The draft is an issue among new voters. A majority (56%) are at least somewhat concerned about the reinstatement of the draft compared to 42% who are not concerned. Men (44%) are less concerned than women (66%). Black women (85%), Blacks (82%) and Latinos (71%) are the most likely to be concerned about a potential draft, and more than a third (35%) of new voters ages 17 to 30 are “very concerned” while an additional 30% are somewhat concerned.

Concern about the draft coupled with the fact that the President clearly and publicly denies its very possibility suggests that new voters are forming rational expectations of future government policy. Just as consumers anticipate future interest and inflation rates during wartime without consulting the Federal Reserve first, new voters may, during wartime, anticipate the risk of a draft without consulting the President. Our poll provides support for this theory, as even 38% of Bush supporters worry about a draft.

Most first-time voters are concerned that the Federal government will reinstitute the draft.

Question 37: How concerned are you that the Federal government will reinstate the draft to require some Americans to serve in the U.S. Military – are you very concerned, somewhat concerned, not that concerned, or not concerned at all?



The First-time Voters Tracker Survey by Pace University & Rock the Vote Chart 11

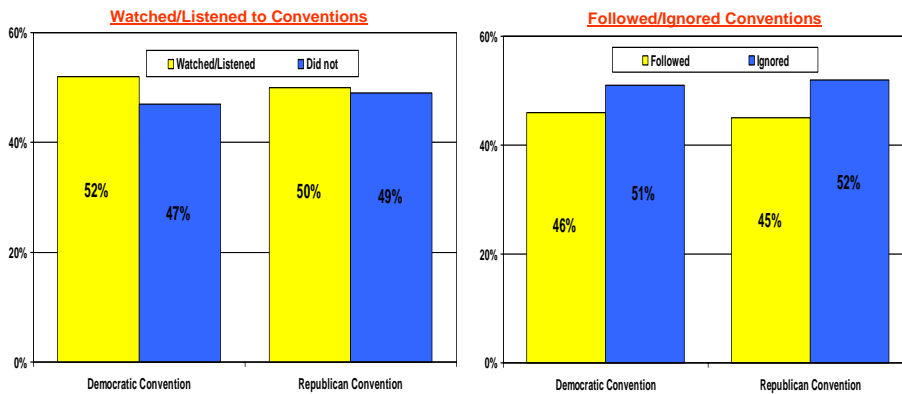
First-time voters followed the conventions.

A majority (52%) saw or heard the Democratic National Convention; just 47% skipped it. Those over 55 (67%) and college graduates (62%) are the most likely to have watched the convention. An additional 46% followed the convention at least somewhat closely.

New voters watched or listened to the party conventions.

Questions 20 & 23: Did you watch on television or listen on the radio to the Democratic/Republican Conventions?

Questions 21 & 24: Did you follow the Democratic/Republican Conventions?



The First-time Voters Tracker Survey by Pace University & Rock the Vote Chart 12

Despite all the convention watching, few of the speakers left a permanent impression. Nearly 4 in 10 (39%) could not remember any particular speaker at the Democratic Convention; 27% remembered Kerry's speech, and 13% recalled Edwards'. An additional 10% remembered Bill Clinton's, and 7% recalled Barak Obama's. Teresa Heinz Kerry (6%) and Hillary Clinton (5%) round-out the remembered speakers list.

The numbers for the Republican National Convention are similar. About half (50%) saw the GOP convention, and 45% followed it at least somewhat closely. Once again, few speakers made a lasting impact: 37% do not remember any speaker, 29% recall George W. Bush's speech while 14% remember Dick Cheney's and Arnold Schwarzenegger's. Zell Miller's call to arms registers with 8% of new voters while Laura Bush and Rudolph Giuliani are remembered by 7%. John McCain rounds out the remembered GOP speakers at 5%.

Although the media tends to ridicule conventions as info-mercials for political parties, 27% of new voters say the conventions made them at least somewhat more interested in the campaign. Meanwhile, just 7% say it made them less interested. Since this year was the first year that the networks reduced coverage of the conventions to one hour, one wonders how many more new voters would have been inspired by the conventions had their coverage been wider.

First-time voters followed the debates.

More than 3 in 4 (77%) new voters followed the Presidential debates at least somewhat closely. Forty-two percent followed them very closely while 35% followed them somewhat closely. Only 10% did not follow them closely while just 12% did not follow them at all.

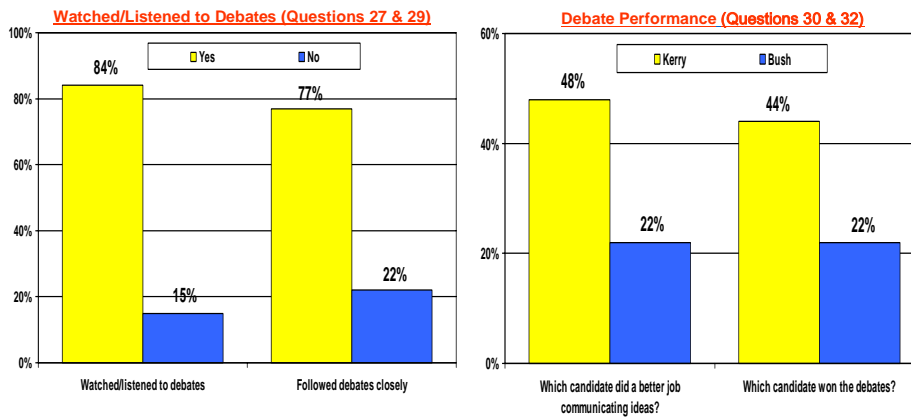
New voters paid rapt attention to the presidential debates.

[Question 27: Did you watch on television or listen on radio to the debates?](#)

[Question 29: Did you follow the debates closely?](#)

[Question 30: Which candidate did a better job communicating his ideas during the debates?](#)

[Question 32: Which candidate do you think won the debates?](#)



The First-time Voters Tracker Survey by Pace University & Rock the Vote

Chart 13

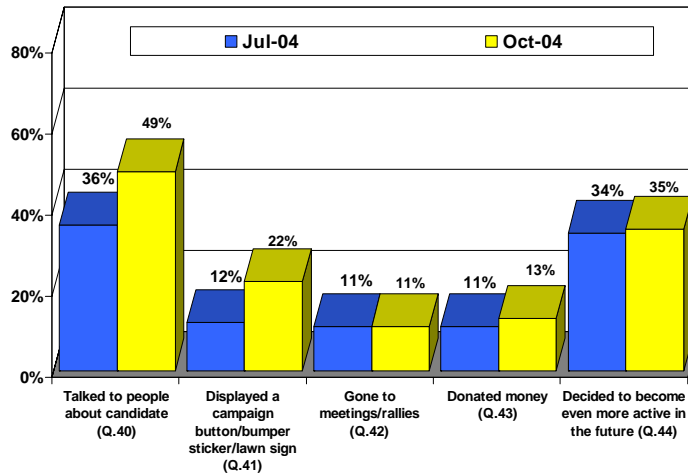
Kerry was the clear debate winner among new voters. Almost half (48%) think Kerry did a better job communicating his ideas, while 22% think Bush did. In addition, 39% think Kerry looked more presidential; only 32% thought the President looked more presidential. Overall, only 22% think the President won the debates while twice as many (44%) give the nod to the challenger. In particular, independents (41% to 11%) and undecideds (35% and 10%) name Kerry the winner. And among those who actually watched the debates, Kerry won decisively (50% to 23%.) Indeed, more conservatives think Kerry won the debates (22%) than liberals think Bush won them (7%).

The campaign has affected new voters' political participation.

By some measures, new voters have increased their political activities as the campaign has worn on. In July, 36% had tried to persuade another person to vote for their candidate. As of October, 49% have now done so. In July, 12% had displayed campaign paraphernalia, like a bumper sticker on a car; now, 22% have. Yet, new voters continue to refrain from more active involvement. In July, 11% had attended a political rally; now, 13% have. In July, 11% had donated money to a campaign; now, 13% have.

Since July, new voters have increased some of their political activities as the campaign comes to a close.

Questions 40-44: Please tell me about your political activities in conjunction with the presidential campaign. Have you...?



The First-time Voters Tracker Survey by Pace University & Rock the Vote

Chart 14

The campaign has not affected new voters' expectations regarding their own level of political activity. In July, 34% expected to become more active, 4% expected to become less so, and 60% expected to maintain the same level of political activity. Today, 35% expect to become more active, 4% expect to become less so, and 60% expect to maintain the same level of political activity.

V. CONCLUSION

There are really two key questions about Godot: 1) Will he come?, and 2) Will it matter to those of us who are waiting for his appearance? Likewise, there are two critical questions about new voters: 1) Will they turn-out?, and 2) Will they affect the outcome of this election?

In answer to the first question, our poll provides persuasive evidence that new voters will turn-out. On the second question, however, new voters – like other Americans – appear evenly divided. At first blush, this finding looks to minimize the significance of new voters; upon closer consideration, however, one realizes the importance of their participation.

First and foremost, new voters must live under the government this election will yield; consequently, their participation is a normative duty. In addition, their participation will bestow added legitimacy upon the winner. Also, the participation of first-time voters bodes well for the future. Today, new voters vote; tomorrow, they volunteer for, donate to, and lead campaigns for civic causes. There is an abundance of evidence that fundamental civic behavior, like voting, can instill broader habits of the heart, and,

encouragingly, 35% of new voters intend to become more politically active in the future.

VI. METHODOLOGY

This survey is based on nationwide phone interviews of 600 voters between October 14 and October 21, 2004. The findings of the survey are statistically significant within a $\pm 4\%$ margin of error at a 95% level of confidence. Error margins increase for cross-tabulations. Though the Pace Poll adheres to strict methodological standards, the practical elements of fielding any survey can introduce additional sources of error.

For the purposes of this study, “new registrants” were defined as people who registered after the 2000 Presidential election. Respondents were randomly selected from a list of new registrants in 43 states and the District of Columbia. Because the availability and nature of voter registration lists vary from state to state, town to town, and county to county, this sample is unavoidably incomplete. That is, all new voters did not have an equal chance to be selected for participation in our study.

For example, we have no contact information at all for new voters in seven states (Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin). Although we have contact information for voters in the other forty-three states and the District of Columbia, registration rules are not always uniform throughout an entire state; consequently, we did not have contact information for voters from every town or county in seven additional states (Alabama, Florida, Indiana, Maine, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, and Washington). In addition, different registrars update their voter lists at different times; consequently, we missed any new voters who registered after the most recent update to which we had access. In theory, new voters could have registered as early as the day after the 2000 Presidential Election or as late as the day on which our sample was created.

Despite these limitations, our sample is the best, most-complete sample of new voters available. Had we attempted to contact new voters via Random Digit Dialing (“RDD”), we might have overcome some of these limitations, but RDD sample would have been prohibitively expensive, since we would have contacted a large number of people who would have been ineligible for participation in the study. To put it another way, new voters are simply too small a share of the general population to contact via RDD. Although final registration numbers are not yet available, a substantial number of new registrants may have registered after our sample was created. These late registrants may or may not differ from our sample in material ways.

More importantly, the accuracy of a RDD study would have depended upon the accuracy of respondents’ memory regarding the date of their registration. Since we have no particular reason to suspect that people are likely to remember when they registered, RDD would have suffered from imperfections of its own – the over-inclusion of self-described new voters who actually registered *before* 2000 and the under-inclusion of self-described old voters who actually registered *after* 2000. Whether these imperfections

would have been greater than or less than the imperfections in our sample can only be resolved through further study.